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AUTHOR	Whiteman, Jo Ann M.
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ABSTRACT

Employers have looked to postsecondary schools as a source of trained workers, including graduates of both vocational and general education programs. Fifty-four successful and effective community college programs focus on innovative strategies for meeting current and future work force developments and requirements. The partnership programs begin with School to College and continue to College to College and Community Colleges, Businesses, and Agencies. Private Industry Councils (PIC) are now an instrument of a marketplace that demands more efficient allocation of the labor force. PICs are generally referred to work force development boards who represent stakeholders and providers of local work force programs based on specific needs of the business community. Schools need to cultivate critical thinking and provide an environment for understanding the changing environment and what will be required of the 21st century economy. Schools should focus on active learning, acquiring methods or processes of solving problems, relevant learning, and meeting community needs. (Contains 10 references.) (YLB)

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Workforce Performance – A Pragmatic View

Jo Ann M. Whiteman

University of Central Florida

J. Whiteman

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to focus on an ever-changing workforce and what is needed from schools to enhance the performance of the 21st Century workforce.

Workforce Needs

Employers have looked to postsecondary schools as a source of trained workers, including graduates of both vocational and general education programs. (Hirshberg, 1991).

The U.S. Census Bureau reports that over half of manufacturers cite the need for a skilled workforce as the most significant barrier to technology adaptation. Gone are the days of the manufacturing industry hiring people straight out of high school. The emergence of a global, technology-driven, skills-based economy has created the need for knowledgeable workers (Thomas & Wagner, 2000).

In Minnesota a report by the Citizens League Committee on Workforce Training urged the legislature to invest more money to improve the skills of current workers and encouraged employers to do the same. The new workforce, in their report, was not capable to understanding the concepts of just-in-time inventory, statistical process control, or computer aided manufacturing. Training the new workforce had become a do or die proposition. Without a labor pool to draw from, a crisis would arise and industry business would possibly be lost to other states that could provide the human capital needed (Thomas & Wagner, 2000).

In Winston-Salem, North Carolina where the average unemployment rate is under two percent, applicants referred by agencies had a lower than average level of education and job skills and required both basic and technical skill

training to be successful employees and to enhance their earning potential. (Johnson, 2000).

Workforce Development

In a report, *Preparing a Twenty-First Century Work Force: Innovations in Programs and Practices* prepared by David Scott available from the League for Innovation in the Community College there are fifty-four (54) successful and effective community college programs that focus on innovative strategies for meeting current and future workforce developments and requirements. The partnership programs begin with School to College and continue to College to College, and Community Colleges, Businesses and Agencies (Scott, 1997).

The PIC (Private Industry Councils) is now an instrument of a marketplace that demands more efficient allocation of the labor force. They are generally referred to workforce development boards. They are boards of directors charged with overseeing allocation of job training funds. They are made up of a majority of private sector members joined with other leaders, including representatives from community colleges, elementary and secondary education, the employment service, community-based organizations, organized labor and others. Their mission is to develop the skills of the entire workforce in local communities and to ensure a smoothly functioning local economy. The broad goals for all local workforce programs in its system are based on the specific needs of the business community. The board acts as a broker between employers and service providers – working on projects that are mutually beneficial to all. Some

of these projects include One-stop Career Centers where job seekers can find jobs and learn how to qualify for jobs. These centers will become places where employers can find qualified workers and can learn about resources to expand their companies and upgrade their workforce. (Knight, 1998).

The Challenge to Schools

Workforce performance and development has become an essential prerequisite to a successful economic development effort. Both economic and workforce development have become intertwined. "Our changing workplaces and workforce requires the same effort and attributes that characterized the successful economic development efforts during the 1980s: strong, broad-based partnerships, focused mechanisms, and a regional approach to the effort" (Ovel, 2000). A report released in January 1999 by the Iowa Business Council entitled Iowa's Economic Future: People, Knowledge, and Know How warned: "Iowa's well of potential employees has nearly run dry, and population growth is flat. Economic growth is now stifled by the lack of qualified workers. A shortage of skilled Iowans promises to be the greatest economic crisis since the farm crisis of the early 1980s" (Ovel, 2000). The study concluded by stating: "Manufacturing is still the engine that drives America's booming economy. Its productivity, as well as the qualify, cost effectiveness and creativity of its products, are the envy of both developed and developing countries, which are now our principal customers and competitors" (Ovel, 2000).

Our schools need to cultivate critical thinking and to provide the environment to understanding the changing environment and what will be

required of the 21st Century economy. "The great educational pragmatist was John Dewey, who viewed education as a process for improving (not accepting) the human condition. The school was seen as a specialized environment that coincided with the social environment. No demarcation exists between school and society. The curriculum, ideally, is based on the child's experiences and interests, and prepares him or her for life's affairs and for the future" (Ornstein & Hunkins, 1998). The focus in schools should therefore be placed on:

- Active-learning,
- Acquiring methods or processes of solving problems,
- Relevant learning, and
- Meeting the needs of the community.

Conclusion

Whether a community or state has a competitive advantage depends on the skills of their workforces. The 21st century demands a more educated and skilled workforce (Ovel, 2000; Grubb, Badway, Bell, Bragg, & Russman, 1997; & Thomas & Wagner, 2000).

The goal of education is to provide youth for the future. As Dewey indicated there is a relationship between education and democracy and democracy is a social process that can be enhanced through the school. Schools in America are instruments of democracy. Society and aims of education both influence each other (Ornstein & Hunkins, 1998).

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